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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 001727

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ALGERIAN LOCAL ELECTIONS NOVEMBER 29: WILL  
ALGERIANS VOTE ?

REF: A. ALGIERS 1700

- [1](#)B. ALGIERS 680
- [1](#)C. ALGIERS 338
- [1](#)D. ALGIERS 1559
- [1](#)E. ALGIERS 1695
- [1](#)F. ALGIERS 1527
- [1](#)G. ALGIERS 619
- [1](#)H. ALGIERS 716
- [1](#)I. ALGIERS 1662
- [1](#)J. ALGIERS 647
- [1](#)K. ALGIERS 1344

Classified By: Ambassador Robert Ford; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Local elections will be held in Algeria on November 29, but the big question is whether many Algerians will actually vote. Throughout the campaign season, elections' transparency and fairness have been called into repeated question because of irregularities in the pre-campaign period and of decisions meted out by the Interior ministry. Some political parties view the absence of an independent election monitoring commission as proof of a fatal lack of transparency. Most of our contacts, and the Algerian independent media, anticipate that voter turnout will be low because the population does not view the process as an opportunity for change and because many believe the outcome has already been decided. A low turnout - say of less than 35 percent of registered voters - would mirror the dismal turnout of last May's legislative elections and suggest that there is huge systemic problem in Algeria's political process. Proposed press guidance for the Department appears in paragraph 7. END SUMMARY

NUMBERS

[1](#)2. (U) According to the Interior ministry, there are 18,761,048 registered voters in Algeria. In the November 2007 local elections, candidates are running for positions on city councils (APCs) and for positions in the wilaya (provincial) legislatures (APW). Twenty-three political parties are vying in the local elections for seats in 1,531 APCs and 48 APWs. The Interior ministry has said that 8,259 candidate lists have been accepted for APCs, out of 8,334 submitted. For the APWs, 323 of 330 candidate lists have been accepted. Independents (groups of candidates who declare no party affiliation before the election) have put forward an additional 298 lists.

13. (C) The three most important issues to watch in this round of local elections are voter turnout, the role of the Interior ministry in the vote tallying process, and monitoring of the process in the absence of an election commission. Voter turnout is expected to be low, largely due to voter apathy and disengagement (ref A). Turnout in the May 2007 legislative elections was officially reported to be 35 percent (ref B), though many observers believe that figure was significantly inflated by the government. The ratio of spoiled ballots was also unusually high. Some commentators have said that the publication of participation figures was in itself an improvement over past practices and reflected an increased level of transparency. While on the surface that argument may have some merit, the consensus view among political analysts is that most Algerians did not vote or destroyed their ballots because they were simply disinterested or did not view the political process as a mechanism for positive change.

14. (C) As we have previously reported, the Interior ministry exercises heavy influence over the election process (see ref C). For example, in the lead-up to these elections Interior used its control over candidate lists extensively as a means of limiting who could stand for election. One tool used by the ministry to vet and reject candidates was Police Record No. 3, a non-public file containing information on individuals' behavior. There is no independent verification of the contents of the file and political party representatives have expressed serious concerns about its use. In addition, there were other efforts of the Interior

ALGIERS 00001727 002 OF 003

ministry that were seen as undermining the integrity of the election process (see ref D). Hundreds of candidates were rejected from party lists for the November 2007 election, according to party officials. A variety of reasons were offered and, upon appeal to the Algerian courts, many candidates were reinstated. At the same time, candidates were also rejected for suspect reasons (ref E), including a former senator who was classified as a "threat to public order." This irregular application of candidate registration procedures appears further to have eroded confidence in the election system (ref F).

15. (C) In contrast to the May 2007 legislative elections (refs G, H), there is no independent election monitoring commission for the upcoming local elections (ref I). GOA officials have publicly stated that monitoring was expensive, and officials from the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) have not been concerned by the absence of a commission for these elections, noting that political parties and the international media are expected to be present at polling stations. Establishment of a monitoring commission is not a legal requirement. However, ruling coalition member party Movement for a Society of Peace (MSP) and opposition party Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) have both expressed concern about its absence. In the November 28 edition of the French-language daily Le Soir d'Algerie, MSP representatives described the lack of a commission and the "ambiguity" surrounding the entire election process as "two signs that fool no one." The November 27 issue of best-selling el-Khabr newspaper ran a story that warned that the Interior ministry was taking unspecified steps to ensure a suitably high voter turnout.

16. (U) The government-linked French-language daily newspaper El Moudjahid averred November 27 that Algeria's electoral campaign for local offices has ended "under excellent conditions" and that the Interior ministry had taken measures to ensure the "good rollout" of the voting process, but the above examples and numerous press reports suggest otherwise. Both government and opposition political parties have

expressed repeated public concern about the role of the Interior ministry.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: We expect voter turnout to be low, partly because of significant rainfall throughout the week that has resulted in deaths, floods and collapsed bridges. Many editorialists in Algeria's independent press have pointed to the damage caused by the several inches of rain this week as just one more indication of miserable governance that previous elections have never helped address. There is a sense of resignation among many Algerians that voting is pointless and that their participation in any election will change nothing (ref J). Both press reporting and our conversations with ordinary Algerians suggest that there is a solid stratum of the Algerian population that has willfully disengaged from the country's political process -- a stratum that cuts across demographics. In fact, the November 28 edition of the leading French-language daily El Watan contained a two-page spread underscoring this point. As Algeria grapples with Islamist extremists, the disconnect between the voters and the government bodes ill for the long-term future. A high turnout, while unlikely, would suggest that the political process now engaged still has traction enough to reinforce stability and diminish terrorist groups' recruitment efforts. End Comment.

#### PROPOSED PRESS GUIDANCE

¶8. (SBU) The Department may wish to draw on the following points when developing press guidance on the elections.

-- The United States hopes that Algeria will gradually develop credible democratic processes to foster better governance and help undercut the call of extremists.

-- The November 29 election showed that Algeria still has a distance to go towards a democratic process viewed as credible inside Algeria.

-- There were problems with the compilation of candidate lists and there was no independent election monitoring

ALGIERS 00001727 003 OF 003

commission, as there has been in the past.

-- One of the elements of a successful democracy is a broad consensus on the processes and rules for campaigning and administration of elections.

-- We hope that Algeria will develop this consensus before the 2009 presidential elections.

FORD